

# Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers!

## A National Public Awareness and Partnership Campaign Addressing Aquatic Invasive Species

### Background

As part of its responsibilities to effectively address the growing challenge of invasive species, the Fish and Wildlife Service staffs the national Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Task Force. In response to zebra mussel impacts in the Great Lakes, Congress created this Task Force via the Nonindigenous Prevention and Control Act of 1990 to coordinate prevention, control and eradication efforts between federal and state agencies and the private sector.

The Task Force identified a lack of public awareness as a major obstacle to address this issue. As a result, the Fish and Wildlife Service hired an Outreach Coordinator for the Task Force. Shortly after coming on board, the Outreach Coordinator worked with a committee of the Task Force to create a national public awareness campaign.

### What is the Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! campaign?

Designed collaboratively, Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! addresses multiple aspects of the growing aquatic nuisance species issue that makes it the perfect vehicle to bring relevance and attention to the issue.

The campaign's primary intent is to target the recreational users of our nation's aquatic resources to raise their awareness about and seek their ownership for this issue. Ultimately, this will empower them to take action and become part of the solution in preventing the spread of these nuisance species through their activities. In addition, Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! also aims to

raise awareness and expand ownership with key secondary audiences such as federal and state agencies that manage our aquatic resources and provide recreational opportunities; conservation and species-specific organizations that value these resources; the outdoor media and federal and state policy makers.



**STOP AQUATIC  
HITCHHIKERS!™**

Prevent the transport of nuisance species.  
Clean all recreational equipment.  
[www.ProtectYourWaters.net](http://www.ProtectYourWaters.net)

### When you leave a body of water:

- Remove any visible mud, plants, fish or animals before transporting equipment.
- Eliminate water from equipment before transporting.
- Clean and dry anything that comes into contact with water (boats, trailers, equipment, clothing, dogs, etc.).
- Never release plants, fish or animals into a body of water unless they came out of that body of water.

Using a Task Force policy product as its foundation, Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! converts voluntary technical guidance for recreational users into a simple format of a themed brand that has a distinct visual identity and a strong call to action. As the campaign's focal point, this brand directs the audience to specific information and provides the entire conservation community with a way to make this issue relevant to recreational users of our nation's aquatic resources.

### Why target aquatic recreation users?

Americans love to spend time on the water. Millions of people annually participate in boating, fishing, jet-skiing or sailing. Also, as a highly mobile society, we have the ability to travel extensively in pursuit of new recreation areas. When these activities are viewed by themselves, they make significant positive contributions to our society. However, when combined with lack of

awareness about this issue or a poor understanding about the need for stewardship of these resources, the impacts of aquatic nuisance species create a very expensive problem that costs resource-dependent industries and tax payers millions of dollars.

Research has identified water-based recreation as a potential transportation pathway for the spread of

these nuisance species. Additional studies show that participants in these activities will take action to prevent these invasive species introductions, if they know what to do. Conversely, without proper information, they will do nothing to prevent this problem. To promote prevention behaviors that will limit the spread of aquatic invasive species like zebra mussels or hydrilla, the ANS Task Force developed guidelines that serve as the foundation for the Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! campaign.

### How can I participate in the campaign?

Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! has been designed to encourage multiple levels of participation, ranging from students to federal agencies. For a student or individual, one of the best ways to participate is to learn about the issue, how it affects you and what you can do to prevent the impacts and spread of these species. The campaign provides a fantastic resource in the form of a web site; the address is:

[www.protectyourwaters.net](http://www.protectyourwaters.net)

As for a federal agency, or for that matter, any organization that values healthy aquatic resources, the best way to participate is to become a formal Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! partner. During the development of the campaign, careful attention was paid to positioning Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! as the vehicle for the entire conservation community to support. This was done in an effort to leverage our collective abilities to raise awareness about this growing problem and to promote prevention. By becoming a formal partner, your organization can access many different cooperative marketing materials, multiple versions of the Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! brand and up-to-date information about the campaign, how aquatic invasive species issue is affecting different parts of the country and what is being done to address it.

When developing Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers!, the Fish and Wildlife Service made several strategic decisions that in the long run will enhance the campaign's effectiveness. The first one was our recognition that if the conservation community is going to have any chance in dealing with this issue, we need to focus more on our effectiveness and less on taking credit. As a result, customizable campaign materials were designed for agencies and organizations that wish to become partners. This was done to expand ownership so you could put your organizational logo next to the brand.

The second, related decision addressed ownership on a different level and affected the web site, which is incorporated into the brand. As you can see, it is not a "dot.gov" site. During the Service's informal research, we found that people felt alienated by our technical terminology and use of acronyms to describe the issue. It confused them and did not make the issue relevant in terms they could understand. Subsequently, they concluded that their actions would not matter, and only government could address this expanding problem.



### How will the FWS evaluate this campaign?

Evaluation is the key to Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! The Service is very serious about accountability and its use of tax payer dollars. We are collaborating with the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in hopes of stepping the campaign down to the state level to evaluate its effectiveness in raising awareness about the issue. Modeled after the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation's Water Works Wonders campaign, we intend to use similar methodology to evaluate Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers! By working with four pilot states, we will measure peoples' awareness before and after the campaign is introduced into a state.

### For more information, contact:

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